Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 03277 01 OF 02 111309Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /011 W
----------074283 111318Z /42
O 111120Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1823

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 3277

NEA FOR DUTY OFFICER

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, IS, US
SUBJECT: PRESS STORY

1. PLEASE ENSURE THAT AMBASSADOR LEWIS RECEIVES THIS MESSAGE SATURDAY MORNING AFTER HIS ARRIVAL AT DEPT.

2. FOR AMBASSADOR. THOUGHT THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE MIGHT BE OF INTEREST IN CONNECTION WITH YOUR SUNDAY OUTING. IT APPEARED IN FRIDAY'S MA'ARIV. AUTHOR: TIROSH.

3. BEGIN TEXT: FOR SOME WEEKS NOW POLITICAL CIRCLES HAVE BEEN MENTIONING THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW POLITICAL ALIGNMENT. THIS TALK IS THE RESULT BOTH OF POLITICAL DIFFERENCES OF OPINION WHICH ARE SPLITTING POLITICAL BLOCS AND PARTIES- AS WELL AS THE WEAKENING OF THE GOVERNMENT.

4. A NEW POLITICAL ALIGNMENT COULD TAKE ONE OF SEVERAL FORMS: A CHANGE IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE CABINET ON THE PERSONAL OR PARTY PLANE; A CHANGE IN THE PARTY ALIGNMENT, I.E., SPLITTING AND OR MERGING BASED ON COMMON POLITICAL OPINIONS. MOST POLITICAL OBSERVERS, AND THE UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 02 TEL AV 03277 01 OF 02 111309Z

POLITICIANS THEMSELVES, BELIEVE THAT THE NEED FOR POLITICAL DECISIONS, WHEN IT COMES, WILL LEAD TO A NEW ALIGNEMNT IN ONE OF THE WAYS OUTLINED ABOVE, THE QUESTION ONLY BEING WHEN THIS IS EXPECTED - WHETHER IT IS A MATTER OF WEEKS, OR WHETHER IT WILL TAKE AS LONG AS A YEAR (AS, FOR INSTANCE, FINANCE MINISTER EHRLICH THINKS).

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

5. THE EVENTS OF LAST WEEK REGARDING THE GROUND DEVELOPMENT WORK AT NEBI ZALAH AND BEIT EL, WHICH CAME TO A HEIGHT WITH THE DEFENSE MINISTER'S THREAT TO RESIGN, DID NOT ONLY CAUSE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION BETWEEN WEIZMAN'S SUPPORTERS AND HIS OPPONENTS IN THE GOVERNMENT AND IN LIKUD, THEY INTENSIFIED THE EVALUATIONS AND RUMORS REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW POLITICAL ALIGNMENT.

6. THE DEFENSE MINISTER'S STAND, FAVORING A HALT TO SETTLEHMWT AT THIS STAGE AND ESPECIALLY FAVORING THE STOPPAGE OF THE GROUND DEVELOPING WORK IN THESE TWO SAMARIA SETTLEMENTS UNTIL AFTER THE PRIME MINISTER'S WASHINGTON VISIT, HAS THE BACKING OF THE LIBERALS, OF THE DMC, A PART OF HERUT AND A PART OF THE NRP. AS FOR THE SUPPORTERS OF SHARON, WHO FEEL THAT THE STOPPAGE OF THESE WORKS WILL WEAKEN ISRAEL'S POSITION, THEY ARE FOUND IN HERUT, IN LA'AM AND THE NRP. LA'AM THIS WEEK EVEN CONSIDERED ADOPTING A RESOLUTION AGAINST THE DEFENSE MINISTER'S STAND AND HIS RESIGNATION THREAT - WHICH WOULD HAVE UNDERLINED THE POLARIZATION OF VIEWS IN THE LIKUD- BUT WAIVED THE NOTION AT THE LAST MINUTE.

7. IT IS NO WONDER, THEN, THAT WITHIN THE LIKUD, TOO, EACH SIDE IS CALCULATING WHAT THE BALANCE OF POWER IS IN THE LIGHT OF A POSSIBLE CONTEST AND CHANGED POLITICAL ALIGNMENT. SHARON BELIEVES THAT THE MAJORITY IN HERUT
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BACK HIS OPINIONS AND THAT HIS POPULARITY IN THE MOVE-MENT HAS RISEN, AND THAT WHEN THE TIME COMES TO COMPETE FOR THE LEADERSHIP-THE MAJORITY WILL BE ON HIS SIDE. WEIZMAN'S SUPPORTERS ASSERT THAT THE OPPOSITE IS TRUE; MOREOVER, THEY ARE SURE THAT WEIZMAN HAS THE SUPPORT OF A GREAT MANY ELEMENTS OUTSIDE HERUT AND THAT HE COULD OBTAIN THE LEADERSHIP EVEN WITHOUT HERUT'S FULL SUPPORT.

8. IN THIS CONTEXT IT IS RECALLED THAT ONE OF THE LIBERAL PARTY HEADS SAID IN A CLOSED TALK RECENTLY: "WEIZMAN WILL BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER - WITH HERUT OR WITHOUT." HE EXPLAINED THAT THE DEFENSE MINISTER WAS THE ONLY LIKUD CANDIDATE CAPABLE OF SUCCEEDING BEGIN WHEN THE TIME CAME; AND IF HERUT REFUSES TO ELECT HIM, HE WILL BE WELCOMED WITH OPEN ARMS BY THE LIBERALS AND STAND AT THEIR HEAD. IN THAT CASE THE LIBERAL PARTY AND WEIZMAN'S SUPPORTERS IN HERUT COULD ESTABLISH A GOVERNMENT HEADED BY HIM, BASED ON THEIR COALITION WITH THE ALIGNMENT, DMC AND THE SMALL FACTIONS - A KIND OF "CENTRAL BLOC." THIS IDEA WAS ALSO RAISED IN A RECENT TALK BETWEEN A LIBERAL PARTY LEADER AND A VERY SENIOR ALIGNMENT FIGURE, WHO MET AT THE INSTIGATION OF A MUTUAL FRIEND AND DISCUSSED

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

THE SITUATION FOR SOMETHING LIKE FOUR HOURS.

9. IT IS ALSO KNOWN THAT LIBERAL HEAD SIMCHA EHRLICH SUPPORTS WEIZMAN'S POLITICAL STAND, AND ALSO SEES IN HIM A SUITABLE CANDIDATE FOR THE PREMIERSHIP. THAT IS WHY THE REPORT OF EHRLICH'S THREATENING TO FOLLOW SUIT AND RESIGN, IN THE EVENT THAT THE DEFENSE MINISTER RESIGNED, WAS RECEIVED QUITE NATURALLY, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS DENIED BY THE MINISTER OF FINANCE.

10. THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE MAKES NO ATTEMPT TO CONCEAL HIS STAND FAVORING AN EXPANSION OF THE GOVERNMENT AT THIS JUNCTURE BY COOPTING THE ALIGNMENT. ACCORDING TO A REPORT PUBLISHED THIS WEEK, HE EXPLICITLY SAID SO IN
UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 TEL AV 03277 01 OF 02 111309Z

THE U.S. HE KNOWS THAT BY HAVING THE ALIGNMENT COME IN HE WILL BUTTERESS HIS POLITICAL POSITION IN THE CABINET. ACCORDING TO ONE VERSION WEIZMAN HELD A TALK WITH OPPOSITION LEADER SHIMON PERES A FEW DAYS BEFORE HE LEFT FOR THE U.S., AND THEY ALSO DISCUSSED THE QUESTION OF FORMING A NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT. BUT GAD YAAKOBI EMPHATICALLY DISCLAIMED THESE RUMORS, STATING THAT THE ALIGNMENT HAD NO INTEREST IN ENTERING THIS GOVERNMENT, IN ITS PRESENT SITUATION AND WITH ITS POLICY. HE EVEN SUGGESTED, SARDONICALLY, THAT IF A WEEK COMES WHEN ALL ITS MEMBERS ARE IN THE COUNTRY, THE CABINET OUGHT SERIOUSLY TO CONSIDER REVERTING TO THE FULFILLING OF ITS HISTORIC FUNCTION AS THE OPPOSITION.....

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 03277 02 OF 02 111412Z
ACTION NEA-10

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UNCLAS SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 3277

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

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11. BEGIN CERTIANLY IS NOT PLEASED WITH WEIZMAN'S BEHAVIOR AND WITH THE HALO OF BALANCED WISDOM HE IS ACQUIRING. NOR DOES HE LIKE HIS COVERT INITIATIVES REGARDING A NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT. THE ENTHUSIASM AND SUPPORT DISPLAYED BY THE AMERICANS TOWARD EZER WEIZMAN IS NOT TO HIS LIKING EITHER. WEIZMAN'S INVITATION TO MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT SURPRISED EVERYONE, INCLUDING WEIZMAN HIMSELF. WHEREAS THE ADMINISTRATION, AND EVEN THE PRESIDENT, CRITICIZE ISRAEL'S PRIME MINISTER - THE AMERICANS ARE CONSTANTLY PRAISING THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE, ALTHOUGH NOT IN PUBLIC. THEY APPARENTLY FEEL THAT HE IS THE MAN LIKELY TO SHOW FLEXIBILITY AND BRING ABOUT A PEACE SETTLEMENT. THIS IS ALSO EXPRESSED HERE AT HOME. THE AMERICAN ELEMENTS WHO ARE HOLDING INFORMAL TALKS HERE WITH ISRAELI FIGURES, ASK THEM REPEATEDLY IF THEY FEEL THAT EZER WEIZMAN IS BUILT TO BE A NATIONAL LEADER, IF HE HAS THE STATURE TO LEAD ISRAEL TO PEACE. CERTIAN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES ESTIMATE CAUTIOUSLY THAT THE AMERICANS JUST MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN HAVING EZER WEIZMAN REPLACE BEGIN. NONE OF THIS HAS ESCEPED THE PRIME MINISTER'S ATTENTION, AND IS CERTAINLY NOT HELPING TO RAISE WEIZMAN'S STOCK IN HIS EYES. OUTWARDLY HE IS RESTRAINED AND CALM, AND WHEN THE AFFAIR OF THE RESIGNATION THREAT "EXPLODED" ON TUESDAY THIS WEEK AND REACHED THE MEDIA, BEGIN
UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 02 TEL AV 03277 02 OF 02 111412Z

ANNOUNCED THAT HE HAD TO WORK AS USUAL, AND CONTINUED WITH HIS CLOSELY PACKED DAY'S AGENDA.

12. BUT THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT THIS AFFAIR, COMING IN THE LIGHT OF ALL THE ABOVE, DID SHAKE UP THE IMPROVED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS DEFENSE MINISTER, SO MUCH SO THAT ONE OF MR. BEGIN'S CLOSE ASSOCIATES STATED THIS WEEK THAT IF WEIZMAN CONTINUED LIKE THIS - THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD CLIP HIS WINGS, ADDING THAT WEIZMAN HAD HIMSELF DEALT A HARD BLOW TO RECENT EVENTS.

13. SO FAR WEIZMAN HAS BENEFITED FROM WHAT HE HIMSELF CALLS THE MISTAKES MADE BY HIS RIVALS - MOSHE DAYAN AND ARIEL SHARON, WHO HAD CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND BOTHERED HIM WHILE WEIZMAN SAT BY QUIETLY, THEREBY EARNING BEGIN'S ESTEEM. THERE WAS EVEN AN EVALUATION TO THE EFFECT THAT BEGIN WAS INCLINED TO SHARE THE DEFENSE MINISTER'S VIEWS ON THE SETTLEMENTS ISSUE, AND THAT HE WAS PREPARED TO RID HIMSELF OF THE

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

AGRICULTURE MINISTER IN THE CABINET. BUT SOMETHING
SEEMS TO HAVE CHANGED HERE AND WHEN THE PRIME MINISTER'S
CLOSE ASSOCIATES SPEAK OF TROUBLES CAUSED BY MINISTERS
THESE DAYS, AND BEGIN HIMSELF ANNOUNCES THAT THE IS GOING
TO INTRODUCE ORDER IN HIS CABINET ONCE HE RETURNS FROM
THE U.S.-THEN THIS REFERS TO BOTH SHARON AND WEIZMAN.
IN A NON-PUBLIC FORUM BEGIN SPOKE OF THE NEED FOR "DRASTIC
STEPS" IN THE GOVERNMENT. SOME INTERPRET THIS TO MEAN
PERSONNEL CHANGES, BUT ONE CONFIDANT OF MR. BEGIN
REJECTED THIS VERSION, SINCE IT WOULD CAUSE TOO GREAT
AN UPHEAVEL IN THE CABINET. HE SAID THAT WHEN THE PRIME
MINISTER RETURNS FROM THE U.S., THERE WILL MOST CERTAINLY
BE A CABINET SESSION TO DISCUSS THE GOVERNMENT'S INTERNAL
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CONDITION, AND MR. BEGIN MAY ALSO CALL IN EACH OF HIS
MINISTERS FOR A PERSONAL TALK, AND EVEN CENSURE SOME OF
THEM. THIS REFERS NOT ONLY TO WEIZMAN AND SHARON, BUT
ALSO, FOR EXAMPEL, TO DAYAN AND MODAI, WHOSE DECLARATIONS
HAVE NOT EXACTLY PLEASED THE PRIME MINISTER - THE FORMER
REGARDING ARMS SUPPLIES TO ETHIOPIA AND THE LATTER ON OIL.
WHAT IS CERTAIN IS THAT WHEN THE PRIME MINISTER REACHES
THE U.S. NEXT WEEK THERE WILL BE A CLARIFICATORY TALK
BETWEEN HIM AND EZER WEIZMAN, NOT NECESSARILY ON WEIZMAN'S
STAND, WITH WHICH BEGIN APPARENTLY AGREES. WEIZMAN'S
OUTBURST IN HIS TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH BEGIN,
WHEN HE THREATENED TO RESIGN, CAME AFTER THE PRIME
MINISTER TOLD HIM OF THE DISCUSSION HELD BY A GROUP OF
MINISTERS ON THE INSTRUCTIONS HE (WEIZMAN) HAD GIVEN
TO STOP THE GROUND DEVELOPING WORK AT NEBI ZALAH AND
BEIT EL, IN THE WAKE OF AN APPEAL AGAINST THESE INSTRUCTIONS,
LODGED BY ARIEL SHARON.

14. BEGIN TRIED TO PROPOSE A COMPROMISE TO WEIZMAN, WHICH
HAD BEEN WORKED OUT AT THIS DISCUSSION, AND THAT IS WHEN
THE OUTBURST CAME. BEGIN WAS HURT BOTH BY THE MANNER
IN WHICH WEIZMAN SPOKE TO HIM, AS WELL AS BY THE LEAK-
ING OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS TALK TO THE PRESS. WEIZMAN
DID, IN LATER CALLS, EXPLAIN HIS OUTBURST TO BEGIN AND
EXPRESS HIS REGRET IN THIS RESPECT; BUT THE FEELING
AMONG THE PRIME MINISTER'S CONFIDANTS IS THAT HE FEELS
CLARIFICATIONS WITH THE DEFENSE MINISTER ARE IN ORDER.

15. THIS WEEK THE PRIME MINISTER STATED AT A
MEETING OF THE LIKUD KNESSET FACTION THAT "THERE HAD
BEEN A HITCH, AND REPAIRS ARE POSSIBLE" IN THE CABINET.
HE SAID HE HAD CERTAIN PROPOSALS TO MAKE FOR THAT
REPAIR, BUT DID NOT GO INTO DETAIL. IT HAS HOWEVER
BEEN LEARNED THAT ONE PROPOSAL IS THAT BEGIN WILL HIM-
SELF TAKE OVER THE CHARIMANSHIP OF THE MINISTERIAL

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

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PAGE 04 TEL AV 03277 02 OF 02 111412Z

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Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

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20 Mar 2014
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